organisation is suppression

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According to Dr. Nick Land, lecturer in Continental Philosophy at the University of Warwick (a title that he hates), pretty much everything the Western tradition has come up with in the way of thinking about itself and the world around it is not only wrong but bad. Using the work of French writers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a jumping off point, Land substitutes a vision of a world of flux forever constructing and reconstructing itself via the operations of countless "machinic processes" for the models supplied by the linear, rationalist thought of the classical, modernist and postmodernist traditions. He draws parallels between the processes of late twentieth century capitalism, fascism, and schizophrenia, and strongly resists attempts to categorise his work, ridiculing the notion that there is even such a thing as "philosophy". He has no time for the academic consensus that you have to produce a turgid tome every two years to prove that you are "serious". At present, his favoured medium is multimedia performance, and he works closely with arts collective Orphan Drift.

James Flint: Why is it that much of the content on the Internet, this supposedly amazingly democratic, anarchic forum, is becoming dull and corporate and organised?

Nick Land: Your question suggests that there's some pre-existing social pool of liberatory, revolutionary, emancipatory creative potential that could be expected to spontaneously express itself as soon as it had an opportunity to do so. But there is no such intrinsic power of innovation latent in the human organism that's just waiting to bounce out onto the web. So the question really is what are the assemblages that are emerging? And correspondingly to what extent are distributed systems becoming operative as such?

JF: So how do systems which are initially freeform and distributed give way to centralised power structures?

NL: You have to understand that organisation involves

subordinating low level units to some higher level functional program. In the most extreme cases, like in biological organisms, every cell is defunctionalised, turned off, except for that one specialised function that it is allocated by the organic totality. And hence the preponderant part of its potential is deactivated in the interests of some higher level unity. That's why the more organised things get, the less interesting their behaviour becomes - "interesting" simply meaning here how freely they explore a range of possible behaviours, or how "nomadic" they are.

JF: I take it from that that you are not as keen on the idea of "self organsiation" as some thinkers.

NL: Organisation is suppression. It's more accurate to say that systems which avoid self-organisation whilst maintaining trajectories of productive innovation end up parasitically inhabited by organisms of all kinds, whether those organism are biological organisms, corporations or state systems. The history of life on this planet right through to Microsoft is of the successive suppression of distributed, innovated systems.

JF: Can you give me an example?

NL: Well, first of all one has autocatalytic chemical systems that are subject to code control by RNA. When RNA begins to complicate enough to start exhibiting various kinds of lateral interference and experimental deviations, it becomes overcoded by DNA. The absolute crucial event in the whole history of the planet is the point at which the earth's bacterial life system - which is very loosely code controlled, comparatively - is subjected to exterminatory gassing by oxygen-emitting, massively highly structured securo-maniac metazoan organisms. Many of the bacteria disappear except insofar as they are captured as productive subcomponents of highly organised, nucleated, concentrational systems which are now what dominate all life on the planet and have done for five hundred million years.

JF: So how would you interpret the classical picture of evolution as a tree-like structure?

NL: The bacterial net is successively suppressed by levels of organisation, tiers of control that have a tree-like structure. But that tree-like structure is not at all inherent, it's actually produced by organisation. It's incredibly similar to the relation between corporations and markets, in the sense that markets are potentially open ended, distributed transaction systems which are subjected to regularisation, hierarchical structuralisation, specialisation and concentration by the corporate structures that superimpose themselves upon them.

JF: Might the widespread use of computers and the net challenge these structures?

NL: The thing about the potentialities of massively distributed computation capacity is that they disperse productive potential. And there's a certain sense in which the personal computer introduces a

fundamental break in the traditional structure of investment by being simultaneously a piece of consumer electronics and a piece of productive apparatus. But although this is the case, the old structures are being artificially maintained.

JF: How?

NL: Buying a personal computer is treated as productive investment if it is done by a corporate entity and as a piece of personal consumption if it is done by dis-integrated [sic] consumers. And presumably this kind of trompe d'oeil is getting results, because the intersection between software, broadcast media and telecommunications is at the moment in an absolute orgiastic state of capital concentration. And clearly the key actors in this sector think that their strategies are based upon some viable avenue of continued advantage - a continuation of the modernist situation of economies of scale, if you like. Their picture is clearly not one of disintegration into small scale horizontal agents.

JF: But can't the net itself help us overcome these illusions, through increasingly universal access to knowledge and communication?

NL: Certainly the great potential in the technical infrastructure of the net is the telecoms base rather than the broadcasting base. This is not a very original thought, but nevertheless it seems of crucial importance. Capitalist and state organisations have an absolutely immense investment in disabling the telecoms dynamics of the forthcoming digital media system. But that doesn't mean that much has yet been done that is particularly exciting with this telecoms infrastructure. The more of it the better, the more that you have a multi-switched high bandwidth communications oriented digital system rather than a one to many broadcast oriented, media-production-media-consumption oriented system, the more chance there is of actually eliciting innovative behaviour out of innovative systems. But I'd be very cynical with regard to the extent to which we have seen any of that yet.